

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Challenges Faced During Data Collection on Substance abuse Prevention among College Students: A Field Experience

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ABSTRACT

Conducting research on substance abuse prevention among college students is highly sensitive and requires careful planning, ethical considerations, and effective communication. This article describes the practical challenges encountered by nursing student researchers during data collection for a study assessing knowledge regarding prevention of substance abuse among college students. The experiences highlighted include administrative barriers, participant management issues, communication challenges, and ethical concerns during the research process. The article also discusses the strategies adopted to overcome these difficulties and the positive outcomes achieved through health education sessions conducted after data collection.

KEYWORDS

• Challenges • Nursing Research • Substance Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse among adolescents and young adults is an emerging public health concern affecting physical, psychological, academic, and social well-being. Research related to substance abuse prevention is essential to improve awareness and early intervention

strategies among college students. However, collecting data on such sensitive topics poses several practical and ethical challenges for researchers, especially student researchers who are in the early stages of conducting field-based studies.

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This article presents the real-time experiences and challenges faced by nursing student researchers while conducting data collection among college students for a study on knowledge regarding prevention of substance abuse.

CHALLENGES FACED DURING DATA COLLECTION

1. Difficulty in Obtaining Institutional Permission:

The foremost challenge encountered was obtaining permission from the college administration. Since the study topic involved substance abuse and alcohol use, the management initially hesitated to permit the study. The administration expressed concern that the topic might negatively influence students or create an unfavorable impression regarding the institution.

In addition, the proposed data collection period coincided with the academic examination schedule during the month of June. Due to this constraint, the institution requested postponement of the data collection process. To address this issue, the researchers adjusted the data collection schedule according to the convenience of the institution and ensured minimal disturbance to academic activities. This flexibility and cooperation helped in eventually obtaining permission.

2. Difficulty in Managing Participants During Data Collection:

Another challenge faced by the researchers was maintaining discipline and concentration among the student participants during administration of the research tool. After distribution of questionnaires, many students began discussing answers among themselves and engaging in unrelated conversations. This created difficulty in ensuring independent and reliable responses.

The researchers addressed this challenge by maintaining proper control of the classroom environment and clearly instructing participants regarding the importance of sincerity, confidentiality, and individual responses. Through patience and effective communication, the researchers successfully guided the participants toward completing the research tool appropriately.

3. Importance of Proper Explanation and Informed Consent:

Initially, some participants appeared hesitant to respond to the questionnaire due to the sensitive nature of the topic. The researchers therefore provided a detailed explanation regarding the purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, voluntary participation, and ethical considerations before obtaining informed consent.

This clear explanation helped establish trust among participants and improved their willingness to provide responses. The process emphasized the importance of transparency and ethical communication in sensitive research studies.

4. Sensitivity of Questions Related to Family History:

Certain questions in the research tool addressed family history of alcohol use or substance abuse. After completion of the questionnaire, some participants approached the researchers privately and expressed discomfort regarding these questions. A few students stated that although such problems were not present in their families, they felt uncomfortable answering these items and believed that they had not provided completely factual responses.

This experience highlighted the emotional sensitivity associated with family-related questions in substance abuse research. Researchers recognized the importance of framing such questions carefully and ensuring participants do not feel judged or stigmatized.

5. Difficulty in Understanding Technical Terminology:

The researchers also observed that some participants had difficulty understanding specific terminology used in the questionnaire, particularly words such as "intoxication." Participants sought clarification regarding the meaning of these terms during data collection.

This challenge indicated the need for using simpler and more participant-friendly language while preparing research tools, especially when conducting studies among young adults or general populations. Avoiding complex medical terminology can improve clarity and response accuracy.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite the challenges faced, the study yielded several positive outcomes. After completion of data collection, the researchers conducted a health education session focusing on prevention of substance abuse, healthy coping mechanisms, and ways to resist peer pressure related to substance use.

The session was well appreciated by both students and the college administration. The management expressed interest in organizing similar awareness sessions for first-year students as well, since permission had initially been granted only for second- and third-year students.

At the end of the program, the researchers formally thanked the principal and management for their cooperation and support. Importantly, the institution assured the researchers that future studies related to substance abuse awareness would also be welcomed. This acceptance and encouragement were considered one of the greatest achievements of the research experience.

CONCLUSION:

Research on sensitive topics such as substance abuse prevention requires patience, ethical sensitivity, flexibility, and effective communication skills. The experiences described in this article demonstrate that challenges in obtaining permission, managing participants, addressing emotional concerns, and simplifying research language can

significantly influence the data collection process. However, with appropriate strategies and professional conduct, these challenges can be successfully managed.

Furthermore, integrating health education along with research activities can create a positive impact on participants and institutions. The experience ultimately strengthened the confidence and research skills of the nursing student researchers and contributed meaningfully to substance abuse awareness among college students.

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